



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

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STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics

September 11, 1969

Dr. K. W. King
Research Corporation
405 Lexington Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Dr. King,

AL I was most intrigued by your letter of August 28th having received Dr. Ramsey's inquiry about your annual award a few weeks earlier. I had been torn between making a specific nomination (A? Hershey) versus reacting rather critically "is this just the kind of award you really want to be making these days? Does not "pure" scientific achievement already have quite enough recognition in our general prestige system?" And the rest of your own letter would have been a pretty good paraphrase of my own reaction.

Well, I still happen to think that A? Hershey is one of the great unheralded scientific intellects of the time and, therefore, if a copy of this letter to Dr. Ramsey will serve as a nomination I hope he will accept it in that spirit. I do not think I would be a very effective or conscientious member of a selection jury, however.

A thoughtful answer to your questions deserves more time and attention than I can distill into a letter just at this moment. And even this ought to be more coherent than it is going to come out.

Let me point first of all to the enclosure on a new program in human biology which is founded on the premise that undergraduate education is a part of the two culture (or n-culture) problem. We have just received word that the Ford Foundation will give us the support we need to get this program off the ground. It is axiomatic, however, that they were unable to give us quite everything we asked for, and even at that we knew that some requirements would emerge but could only be properly justified after we had gotten more deeply into the implementation of the program. I am particularly concerned about finding funds for some student research projects, particularly those of an interdisciplinary character which tend to be equal distant from the available troughs. Right now I would like to know where I could find about \$4,000 a year to help support an extremely bright medical student who is, believe it or not, writing a competent book about "The Experimental City". (This happens to be David Sachs who wrote a piece about water quality in McCall's last year that did end up having a rather constructive impact in shaking the complacency of a great many people, including Public Health agencies, about this problem.)

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Perhaps one reason that we intuitively focused on undergraduate education for our mind-broadening efforts is that we felt uncomfortable about the further career line that our graduates would be able to follow. So, we were able to assure ourselves that they would either be able to go directly into government or other action oriented work or else could have their training refocused by the strongly convergent potential fields of disciplinary graduate education. This is in part an evasion rather than a solution of the problem and I think we are still struggling to define the nature of the career of the scientific generalist. (This may be a poor epitaph and if it has the wrong connotation for you please substitute another term.)

I think what we have to do is help to provide realistic, functional, effective models of the kind of people that we would like our students to emulate. I do not believe that my own education was particularly narrow, but that might simply push the focus of our discussion back a few years to try to find the roots of the breadth of interest that would motivate someone like myself to educate himself in such a way that he did not regard his "other reading" as done on time "stolen" from his scientific training. On the other hand, you and I both know very well that quality control in the academic system is very tightly coupled to what is now the conventional success in research output and we could be hard put to define other criteria that we could meaningfully apply. Nevertheless, we must, I think, find some way of doing this!

Back to models. One suggestion that I could make to you would be to establish a program of "fellowships-in-situ" to encourage scientists with well established credentials to take an interest in educating or investigating problems of social importance. The system of funding research projects has done wonders for highly directed research, but I do not have to tell you that it does make life a little difficult for the man who wants to wander beyond the confines of his own discipline. In my own case, a sum of some \$10,000 per year could be a very great help in financing a literature research assistant and telephone communications in digging up information on a wide range of subjects. (Someone commented not completely facetiously that I have the privilege of doing my homework in public, namely, the column on "Science and Man".) For others grants of this order could be quite invaluable for travel or even in some cases to justify part of their own salary which is otherwise committed to obligations of specified teaching and research. In fact, I don't know how we are going to maintain a sufficient standard of scientific vigilance and social criticism, unless we make it very easy for professors to do this sort of thing, and I would hope that you might be able to put some steam behind this kind of movement. I would hope that you not demand a specific project outline from applicants for these grants but merely a statement of commitment that the funds will be used for broader social inquiry than can be supported from conventional research grant sources. I do not deceive you that there is a large element of self-service in this proposal and I would indeed hope to find a place on line.

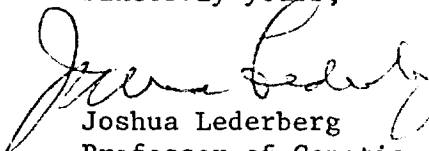
Dr. K. W. King

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I am off now to a meeting, not irrelevant to the same considerations, which is being held in Stockholm. This may perhaps give you time to react to my remarks above and I may myself have more to say about it.

Sincerely yours,



Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr

cc: Dr. H. H. Ramsey
Enclosure

P. S. I am chagrined to think that I have to write my column here, mail it to the Washington Post who then transmits it back to San Francisco and that you then get it by another transcontinental passage from Dr. Ramsey. It does appear every Saturday in the Washington Post which I suspect you could get within a few blocks from your office. I am, by the way, just in the process of putting together the 160 or so pieces that I have written during the last three years for publication as a book by Doubleday.

Let me also enclose a few epigrams by Carl Jung which also bear on some other aspects of the same questions.